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Guide Patricia Herman at the amazing National Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock, where they have artfully assembled two dozen or so historical structures on a rolling landscape. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BARNES/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

A road trip to Lubbock?

10 THINGS TO DO IN THIS WEST TEXAS TOWN



Think, Texas
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USA TODAY NETWORK

LUBBOCK — The future of this historic West Texas city is limitless. ● A recent glorious road trip to Lubbock convinced me that the Hub City will soon join the state’s more recognizable tourist magnets, not because of its established blockbusters, such as Texas Tech University athletics, which have already spawned hundreds of handy hotel rooms. ● But rather because

visionaries and entrepreneurs are learning how to turn the city’s ranching, farming and railroading heritage into a human-centric future that appeals to folks of varied ages, backgrounds and geographic origins. ● Geographically, one certainly feels distanced from other parts of Texas out here. The sky is wide open and the horizon low on the Llano Estacado, a vast plateau that hangs 3,000 feet above sea level. ● Distances can be deceptive.

When walking, a few short blocks on a map can turn into a real hike because of wide streets and sidewalks as well as infrequent landmarks or shade. At times, one can imagine being part of Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado’s company wandering these same grid-flat plains.

When driving, however, every target feels close, manageable. Even a barbecue run to the relatively distant suburb of Wolfforth was accomplished in mere minutes.

Because landmarks are scarce and low-slung districts flow into one another, Lubbock, a city of 250,000, can feel like a miniature Houston at times.

The city bears the scars of a segregated and unjust past. Yet the races and classes mix easily when large groups do assemble, which requires some prompting in such a widely spaced city.

My road trip buddies and I were startled, for instance, by the diverse, traffic-stopping crowds that streamed into a creative district on the northeast side of downtown for a First Friday fest of art shows, food trucks and live music.

Bonus: The weather in the summer is more forgiving than in the eastern half of the state.

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The Museum of Texas Tech University is a museum of everything — art, sports, natural history, local history, anthropology, paleontology, photography, you name it. Its vast spaces consist of much more than this mesa-like constituent planetarium.

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Barnes

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help green the street.

As previously mentioned, we stayed at the Cotton Court. (Disclosure: We accepted a modest media discount.) It put us in easy walking distance of several excellent restaurants, wineries, museums and Buddy Holly Hall, a soaring beauty of a performing arts center on Mac Davis Lane (Natives Davis and Holly are buried at the Lubbock City Cemetery, which also features a lovely angel by Texas sculptor Charles Umlauf.)

Like Waco, downtown Lubbock was hit by devastating tornado, this one an F5 on the Fujita scale that hit on May 11, 1970. Because of the extent of the disaster, scientists recalculated the Fujita scale. One can visit a somber memorial to the storm victims on Avenue Q.

5. Buddy Holly Center

For a professional music career that lasted only 18 months, Buddy Holly's proved incredibly memorable and influential. Born into a musical family, Holly could handle his brother's guitar at an early age and moved fluently from country and bluegrass into rock 'n' roll, which he helped define for wider audiences through "That'll Be the Day," "Peggy Sue" and other hits.

A permanent exhibit at the Buddy Holly Center, a former railroad depot, tightly documents his life and career. Well-curated displays make clear that major artists from the Beatles to Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones acknowledged Holly's direct impact on their work. Another display painstakingly traces the sources for rock 'n' roll through the blues, country and other genres.

Holly died in a plane crash after an Iowa concert on Feb. 3, 1959. A statue of Holly rises across the street from the center, backed by plaques that make up the city's West Texas Walk of Fame.

6. First Friday that works

Many communities around the country schedule free monthly festivals that offer arts and/or crafts along with food, drink and entertainment. These merry events are really mostly about socializing, and they are great tools for bringing out crowds.

In Lubbock, trolleys shuttle the guests around different parts of downtown. Yet the main action seems to be around the few blocks just east of Buddy Holly Hall, home to the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, as well as several studios, galleries and markets. Prominent among them is the Charles Adams Gallery, dedicated to West Texas art.

7. Stubb's Memorial and the legacies of East Lubbock

Among the most haunting sites in this city is a cluster of giant, decaying industrial structures that once processed cottonseed oil in East Lubbock. Nearby, off Avenue A, we stumbled on a Texas historical marker dedicated to Lubbock's first cotton gin built in 1903.

Although ranching culture predated it, cotton really made Lubbock. The arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1909 meant the cotton grown on these fertile plains could be shipped all over the country.

Along with the cotton came more African American and Mexican American workers, once segregated in neighborhoods around the industrial works of East Lubbock.

A revered site on East Broadway is the Stubb's Bar-B-Que Memorial, a pocket park where Christopher B. "Stubb" Stubblefield Sr. sold superior



What downtown Lubbock looked like during the 1940s. Downtown east of Avenue Q still needs revival, but it is brimming with possibilities and early winners. This photo graces the local history gallery of the Museum of Texas Tech University.

MICHAEL BARNES/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

barbecue and hosted many of the musical greats of Lubbock and beyond. In 1986, Stubb moved to Austin, but a statue in the tiny park salutes his bountiful West Texas nature.

8. Pioneer life at the National Ranching Heritage Center

Look around the lobby of the handsome museum at this center and you might feel disoriented. Among the offices, meeting rooms and classrooms, only a few historical galleries celebrate the great cattle kingdoms of Texas; two of those rooms were being rearranged at the time of our visit.

Yet follow the maps provided at the entrance to the marvelous grounds behind the building on the Texas Tech north campus. You meander around hills, trees and native plantings to view some two dozen pioneer structures — from dugouts and barn to a Queen Anne mansion — transferred here and carefully outfitted with furnishings and decor of the day.

Hearty guide Patricia Herman told us that the hills were made from tornado rubble, which lent this grouping of moved historical buildings — maybe the best I've ever seen — even more meaning.

9. Into the Museum of Texas Tech University

This is a museum of everything— art, sports, natural history, local history, anthropology, paleontology, photography, you name it. We entered the brick building through a side door across the plaza from the Ranching Heritage Center, so we had no idea about this museum's mammoth scale.

It goes on and on and on: Currently, expert displays on nature photography, Texas Tech history, Native American art, regional wildlife, sports heroes, prehistoric antiquities. I was particularly drawn to an exhibit on recent imaginative art drawn from existing cultural practices.

This is the kind of a museum that can draw families year round, because its exhibits are always changing and evolving.

10. Ransom Canyon and the Upper Brazos

At one point during our road trip, I realized that three major Texas universities — Texas Tech, Baylor and Texas A&M — are more or less located on the Brazos River.

By accident, a previous trip delivered a buddy and I to the former ranch land around Cañon de Rescate, now known as Ransom Canyon, a green oasis on the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River. I returned there on the way out of town.

"Spanish explorers crossed this canyon, part of the larger Yellow House Canyon, perhaps as early as the 1540s," reads the spot's Texas Historical Marker. "Jumano, Apache and Comanche Indians camped here to take advantage of the canyon's protective walls, fresh wa-

ter springs, trees and abundant game.

"In the late 1700s, New Mexican traders known as Comancheros began to exchange agricultural and craft products of their villages for buffalo hides, horses and other items of the Plains Indians along a trade route which passed through this canyon," the marker's text continues. "In the 1800s, a number of captives were brought here by Comanche Indians and sold to Comancheros.

"The Comanchero practice of demanding ransom for their release gave rise to the canyon's name."

Michael Barnes writes about the people, places, culture and history of Austin and Texas. He can be reached at mbarnes@gannett.com. Sign up for the free weekly digital newsletter, Think, Texas, at statesman.com/newsletters, or at the newsletter page of your USA Today paper.



The historic part of the Texas Tech University campus is quite lovely in a formal way. Especially since more trees have been planted since my last visit. The man memorialized in the distance is late Gov. Preston Smith, who almost single-handedly turned what had long been a technical college into a major university. MICHAEL BARNES/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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